

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

McElrath Property

Greetings, and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

We wanted our oldest daughter's first camping trip to be close to home in case panic struck in the middle of the night and to limit time cooped up in a car. We also wanted plenty of opportunity for childhood exploration - always better if water is present.

We arrived at the North Mills River recreation area, near the Asheville airport, on a Saturday afternoon to find the campground full. It was late spring and they explained you have to get there early Friday if not Thursday to get a spot for a weekend night.

The popularity of the North Mills River helps underscore the importance of this area and this river to the region. It's a destination for campers, hikers, anglers, and mountain bikers. The North Mills River feeds the Mills River, which is home to the endangered Appalachian elktoe mussel and a source of drinking water for Asheville and Hendersonville.

95-year old Howard McElrath was born in this area, and generations of his family have enjoyed a finger of land along Seniard Creek, which feeds the North Mills River. In part a reaction to the pace of mountain development, the McElrath family recently placed a conservation easement on 436 acres of that property – helping protect downstream water quality, protect the integrity of Pisgah National Forest, which surrounds the property on three sides, and ensure the land will always remain as wild as the McElrath family has enjoyed for nearly a century.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.